



# Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

## Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member

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### REPRESENTATIVE BENNIE G. THOMPSON'S OPENING STATEMENT ON THE DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSED STRUCTURAL CHANGES

WASHINGTON—Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), ranking member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, and the Committee's Democrats today welcomed the Department of Homeland Security's reorganization plan but called for more to be done to make the Department a more capable fighter against the war on terror.

Rep. Thompson's comments echo those made by Committee Democrats in a report released this morning titled "Protecting America against Terrorists: The Case for a Comprehensive Reorganization of the Department of Homeland Security."

"The review confirms what many of us on this Committee have known for awhile: the Department is broken. Some of us have been waiting quite a long time for the repairman to show up to take care of the problem. Unfortunately, the long-awaited repairs did not shore up the cracked and broken foundation. We can do better to prevent terrorist attacks on American soil and we must do better. While I commend you for taking the initiative and addressing important issues, I do not believe the plan is comprehensive.

"The questions that I asked myself while I was reviewing your plan were: will this fix the Department so it can do its job and prevent the next terrorist attack in America? Would what you have done stop a London-like attack here in the U.S.? Sadly, the answers to both these questions is no.

"This morning, the Democratic Members of this Committee released a report assessing the proposed reorganization. I have a copy here which I will include into the record as part of my written opening statement. Don't get me wrong – there are good things about the plan. For example, the elevation of cybersecurity to an assistant secretary position is long overdue. Zoe Lofgren on this Committee has spearheaded the effort to give cybersecurity the priority it needs for more than two years now. I congratulate my colleague from Silicon Valley for her dedication to securing our nation's critical networks and systems.

"The creation of a Chief Medical Office is a promising development. Earlier this week we held a hearing on bioterrorism. As we mentioned to you on Tuesday, it is appalling that DHS has only completed 4 out of the 60 material threat assessments necessary to develop biological countermeasures. I hope the creation of this office will accelerate the process. There are other changes that I and other Democrats support, including adjustments to the US-VISIT program. I encourage you to read our report. Your plan is vague in a number of areas. For example, you have eliminated the Special Assistant to the Secretary for the Private Sector, creating in its place an Assistant Secretary for Policy under a new Policy Directorate. The existing Special Assistant position was created by Congress to ensure that the private sector is a meaningful partner in our efforts to secure our homeland. If the Secretary is proposing a demotion for the official in charge of private sector outreach, that would be a serious step backward. I remain concerned that in another three years, we will be waiting for the next overdue plan: "The Third Stage Review" is probably what it will be called.

"What are we going to do about Transportation Security Administration and your plan's failure to correct its many ills? The London bombing last week, coupled with the Madrid bombing last year, should be a wake-up call that our trains and transit systems are an attractive target to terrorists. Despite this warning, we have left TSA with responsibility over both aviation and transit security. While TSA has focused on aviation - some would say with mixed results - rail security has

become the forgotten step-child. This is unacceptable. Rail security **MUST** be a priority, even if TSA has to be reorganized to make it one.

“There are other glaring omissions in this plan that I hope we will be able to touch upon. Again, I hope you will review the Democratic report and that we will have continued dialogue on how to incorporate our ideas into your plan. It is essential that the Department be reorganized correctly today so that the federal government can assure the public that it is doing everything it can to prevent, detect, and respond to terrorism here at home.”

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